<u>Amendments to the Claims</u>:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Canceled)

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously presented) The method of claim 31, said performing step including the step of contacting said sample with a quantity of HCV antigen.

4. (Previously presented) The method of claim 31, said performance of said antibody-based assay providing results indicating whether said sample is antibody positive or antibody negative.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Canceled)

7. (Previously presented) The method of claim 31, said method permitting a prediction having at least an 80% probability that the individual providing said fluid sample has chronic HCV infection.

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, said prediction having at least a 90% probability that the individual providing said fluid sample has chronic HCV infection.

9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, said prediction having at least a 95% probability that the individual providing said fluid sample has chronic HCV infection.

10. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, said prediction having at least a 97% probability that the individual providing said fluid sample has chronic HCV infection.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 7, said method permitting a prediction that the individual has a probability of less than 50% of having chronic HCV infection.

12. (Currently Amended) A method of predicting whether an individual providing a first fluid sample comprising biological fluid testing positive for HCV antibodies from an HCV antibody assay capable of detecting more than one HCV antibody has chronic HCV infection and said assay having a plurality of different HCV antigens reactive with different antibodies ~~antigen~~ therein, said method comprising the steps of:

measuring the optical density of a second fluid sample, said second fluid sample comprising (I) a portion of the first fluid sample prior to conducting said the HCV antibody assay, and (ii) said plurality of different antigens from said HCV antibody assy ~~said first fluid sample and HCV antigen from said HCV antibody assay; and~~

correlating said measured optical density with a predetermined standard optical density value derived from individuals known to have chronic HCV infection; and

predicting that the individual providing the first fluid sample has chronic HCV infection based on said correlation.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 12, said predicting step including the step of comparing said measured optical density with optical density ranges corresponding to certain probabilities that the individual has chronic HCV infection.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 13, said optical density ranges providing at least 80% accuracy levels for any measured optical density level.

15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 13, said certain probability that the individual has chronic HCV infection being less than about 10% when said measured optical

density is less than 1.0 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

16. (Previously presented) The method of claim 13, said certain probability that the individual has chronic HCV infection being less than about 15% when said measured optical density is less than 2.35 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

17. (Previously presented) The method of claim 13, said certain probability that the individual has chronic HCV infection being greater than about 70% when said measured optical density is greater than about 2.35 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

18. (Previously presented) The method of claim 13, said certain probability that the individual has chronic HCV infection being greater than about 80% when said measured optical density is greater than 3.0 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

19. (Currently Amended) A method of predicting that an individual testing positive for HCV infection using an antibody-based assay capable of detecting more than one HCV antibody is chronically infected with ~~chronic~~ HCV, said method comprising the steps of:

obtaining a fluid sample from the individual;

contacting said fluid sample with a plurality of different HCV antigens reactive with different antibodies ~~antigen~~ to form a solution;

determining the optical density of said solution having said plurality of different antigens therein; and

comparing said determined optical density with a set of standard optical density values correlated with probabilities of chronic HCV infection and predicting whether or not the individual has chronic HCV based on said ~~correlation~~ comparison.

20. (Original) The method of claim 19, said comparing step including the step of using said standard optical density values to provide the probability that said individual has chronic HCV infection.

21. (Original) The method of claim 20, said probability increasing as said determined optical density increases.

22. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, said probability being less than 20% when said determined optical density is less than about 1.0 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

23. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, said probability being less than 20% when said determined optical density is less than about 2.35 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

24. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, said probability being greater than 70% when said determined optical density is more than about 2.35 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

25. (Previously presented) The method of claim 20, said probability being greater than about 80% when said determined optical density is more than about 3.0 in comparison to a negative control which must have an optical density of 0.1 or less at 660 nm.

26. (Canceled)

27. (Canceled)

28. (Canceled)

29. (Canceled)

30. (Canceled)

31. (Currently Amended) A method of predicting whether or not an individual has chronic HCV infection comprising the steps of:

obtaining a fluid sample from the individual;

performing an antibody-based assay on said sample, said assay including ~~at least one antigen to an HCV antibody~~ contacting said sample with a plurality of different HCV antigens reactive with different antibodies and detecting interactions between the antigens and antibodies from the sample;

determining the optical density of said sample after said antibody-based assay is performed and with said plurality of different HCV antigens present in said sample; and

using the optical density to predict whether the individual has chronic HCV infection by comparing the determined optical density with a correlation curve based on the optical densities of fluid samples in combination with HCV antigen from an HCV antibody-based assay from individuals having chronic HCV infection and individuals that have cleared the HCV infection but still test positive for HCV antibodies.